THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERWANI): (a) Government is deeply concerned over reports in the Pakistan media that Pakistan has test fired a medium-range missile.

(b) and (c) Govenrment closely monitors all developments including those relating to Pakistan's missile programme. Government remains fully committed to taking all steps necessary for safeguarding India's security and national interest against all eventualities.

Indo-Pak Agreement to Set-up working Groups on outstanding issues on J & K

162. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH:
SHRI O.P. KOHLI:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan had after their second round of talks held recently, decided to set-up sight working groups to address outstanding issues, including the most countentious issues relating to Jammu and Kashmir;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Pakistan's Prime Minister, while commenting on this agreement, had said that it was the first time India has recognised Kashmir as disputed and if so, whether this is in contravention of the hitherto unequivocal stand of India that India will never compromise her stand on this issue; and

(d) if so, the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA): (a) and (b) Joint Statement was issued on June 23, 1997 at Islamabad on the conclusion of the second round of the resumed Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan. The two sides decided to address, inter alia, the following subjects:(a) Peace and security, including CBMs; (b) Jammu and Kashmir; (c) Siachen; (d) Tulbul Navigation Project; (e) Sir Creek; (f) Terrorism and drug trafficking; (g) Economic and commercial Cooperation; (h) Promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields. They also agreed to set up a mechanism, including working groups at appropriate levels, to address all these issues in an integrated manner; the issues at (a) and (b) above will be dealt at the level of the Foreign Secretaries, who will also coordinate and monitor the progress of all the working groups. Both sides further agreed to tak all possible steps to prevent hostile propaganda and provocative actions against each other. It would be observed that Jammu and Kashmir will be addressed directly by the Foreign Secretaries themselves.

(c) and (d) The State of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian Union. This constitutional and legal status of the State is embedded in the constitution of India itself. It has also been reflected in the national will as contained in the Parliamentary Resolutions of 1994. There has not been and cannot be any departure from this basic position notwithstanding any Statement or comment which may come from any foreign quarter.

Threat to Indian Cities by Pak Missiles

163. SHRI GOVINDRAO ADIK: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government attention has been drawn to the newsitem appearing in the "Pioneer" dated 4th July, 1997 under the caption "Key cities, N-installations arms depots with Pak missile's range—Threat to nation's security".;

(b) if so, the details in this regard and Government's reaction thereto;

(c) the details of fresh diplomatic initiatives taken to mitigate the threat perception on this account; and

(d) what is the present status in regard to response from Pakistan?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERWANI): (a) to (c) Yes Sir, India is deeply concerned over Pakistan's missile programme and its impact on the region's security. Government of India is committed to taking all necessary steps to safeguard to country's security and national interest in accordance with its own threat perceptions. Government closely monitors all developments including those relating to Pakistan's missile programme.

(d) The dialogue with Pakistan has been resumed at the Foreign Secretary level and, following the last round of discussions in Islamabad, a Joint Statement was issued which envisages discussions on "peace and security" issues. The substance and the modalities of these discussions will be elaborated at the next round of India-Pakistan Foreign Secretary level talks.

Liberalisation of Visa restrictions for Pakstani and US Nationals

164. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have liberalised visa restrictions for Pakistani and the US nationals for visiting India;

(b) if so, what are the details of the liberalisation made;

(c) whether Government propose to liberalise visa restrictions for some other countries also; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA): (a) and (b) In pursuance of encouraging people to people contact and promoting greater interaction among scholars, intellectuals, journalists, writers, artistes, businessmen and others, Government have unilaterally eased the issuance of visas to Pakistani nationals.

Under the liberalised policy, Government have decided to

(i) permit Pakistani tourists to visit India in groups;

(ii) increase the maximum number of cities in India that Pakistani nationals can visit from 8 to 12, with a further relaxation possible for senior citizens;

(iii) designate the International airport at Chennai as an additional checkpoint for the arrival and departure of Pakistani nationals;

(iv) grant one year triple-entry visas to eligible Pakistani businessmen and permit them to enter and exit through different check-points wherever required;

(v) 'Exemptions from Police Reporting' visas can be granted to artistes, journalists, students, poets, writers, senior citizens, children, as well as to businessmen recommended by the SAARC Chamber of Commerce;

(vi) permit reputed artistes from Pakistan to give commercial performances in India; and

(vii) waive visa fees for senior Pakistani citizens, artistes, poets writers, students and journalists. A proposal for liberalisation in visa for US nationals, on reciprocity basis is, under Government's active consideration.

(c) and (d) Rationalisation and liberalisation of visa regime is an ongoing process.

Steps for Bettlement of Indo-Nepal relations

165. SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether government have taken steps to establish better Indo-Nepal relations;